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SUBJECT: OMAN - GOVERNMENT'S NUMBER TWO GIVES HIS VIEWS OF THE REGION

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard J Schmierer, Ambassador, State, Exec; REASON:
1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (S) Summary: In the Ambassador's introductory courtesy call, Oman's number two in government, Sayyid Fahd, gave a frank view of regional issues, interspaced with praise for the United States' efforts. He opined that Iraq will eventually settle down and that the United States had done a great service by removing a bad system, not just a bad ruler. Oman hopes for positive steps from Iran but has increasing concerns over its nuclear program. Oman is looking to India to provide regional political counterbalance to Iran. Pakistan and Afghanistan are two intractable problems that concern Oman, but the country's biggest worry now is Yemen. Oman tries to give good advice to both Israel and the Palestinians but notes that Egypt is the country that can talk to all sides. Sayyid Fahd hopes the UAE and Saudi Arabia can settle their border demarcation issues in the similar, positive fashion as Oman settled its own borders with both countries. End Summary.

¶2. (S) The Ambassador paid a February 6 introductory call on Oman's number two person in the government, H.H. Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmud Al Sa'id, who provided a tour of the Omani horizon. [Note: Sultan Qaboos formally holds the positions of Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, Defense Minister and Finance Minister. Sayyid Fahd is the number two person in the government, holding the title of Deputy Prime Minister for the Council of Ministers, i.e., the cabinet. In formal photographs, he is seen sitting to the right of the Sultan, and he fills in for the Sultan in receiving high-level visitors when the Sultan is unavailable. End Note.] The meeting was scheduled to last an hour but ran close to two.

IRAQ

¶3. (S) Sayyid Fahd ventured that Iraq and its unrest will settle down with time. He said that a fundamental problem is the reality that the Iraqi people have long been deprived of their freedom but now have complete freedom of speech and that they are unaccustomed to this. He noted that today there is neither political imprisonment nor torture. He said the Omani Government knows that the U.S. task is not easy; that it was not just the issue of the removal of Saddam Hussein, but more basically the removal of a bad system, and this is very much a massive undertaking. He noted the complicating factor of the Sunni/Shiite split, but that this development was not unexpected. The Iraqis must settle the issue themselves.

14. (S) Sayyid Fahd noted that the former situation of Saddam's rule had to change and the fact that this very situation has changed is a positive example that could influence more countries to emulate in their own internal efforts in a path towards change. He continued that all people should appreciate the American action. "If there is any degree of doubt, I ask who was prepared to send their children to fight for the rights of others?" He concluded this point by saying that your friends are those you can turn to at any time, good or bad.

IRAN

15. (S) Sayyid Fahd confirmed that Oman does remind Iran that there is no threat of an imminent U.S. invasion. That said, he repeated the familiar Omani point that the U.S. must do more to understand Iran. He said that the U.S. needs an interlocutor through which to contact Iran. Oman hopes that there will be no war in the region, but has concerns over Iran's nuclear program. The Government of Oman believes that there could be some positive steps from Tehran on the nuclear issue, but every time there could be progress "someone always holds back." Sayyid Fahd noted that even the conservatives are not unified. He concluded that the Iranians will find it difficult to bring things back to normal.

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IRAN AND INDIA

16. (S) Oman is encouraging India to engage in the region diplomatically and politically. He said that as Iran wants to be seen as a regional power, Oman wants a balance of power and sees India possibly as that balance. India does not need to present a military presence, according to Sayyid Fahd, a political presence will do. He termed India as a reliable country and a reliable partner, and that India would contribute to regional stability and security.

PAKISTAN

17. (S) Sayyid Fahd said that Pakistan is quite a different issue. It is a large country "with so many fanatics." The social fabric and the cultural fabric are under real threat and Pakistan needs help, both material and psychological support from its friends. He continued, noting that the situation spreads beyond Pakistan's borders, citing the problem in Great Britain, with its substantial Pakistani population. Sorting out who is a fanatic, and who is not, "is a big problem." It doesn't stop there, he noted, it spreads throughout Europe, as these Pakistanis are British, with freedom of travel.

AFGHANISTAN

18. (S) Sayyid Fahd termed the problems in Afghanistan as "huge." The country has no resources and has an "open door" to Pakistan. He noted that tribal power is the predominant power in the country, and added that the tribal leaders not only have no fear of the central government, but no fear of the outside world.

YEMEN

¶9. (S) According to Sayyid Fahd, Yemen is the pressing problem of the moment. It poses a real risk to Oman and the region - the country is not the risk, but individuals are. He said that for Oman, the border is very important, as the Yemeni people have no way out. Were Oman to face a refugee influx, the dilemma would be to determine "who is good and who is not," and "the Saudis have learned [this] the hard way."

¶10. (S) He said that Oman's assistance to Yemen has the sole purpose of doing good for that country. Oman does not want to intervene, just to help. He noted that even in the 1994 war Oman did not intervene in Yemen's affairs, and that the Government of Yemen is still grateful for that. He repeated a familiar Omani (and other) point that the Government of Yemen's real problem is in not taking care of the South. He noted that there was a great opportunity after the 1994 war that was squandered. He concluded that Yemen could be a strong country if it were well cared for and united. He concluded by saying that the problems are internal, and that blaming Iran for them "is not right."

MIDDLE EAST PEACE

¶11. (S) Sayyid Fahd said that he hopes that the United States will "do anything possible to resolve the Palestine/Israel problem." He offered the practical words that it will all boil down to compromise, and that nothing is easy. He said that Israel cannot live forever with the tension it is under. Sayyid Fahd confirmed

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that Oman speaks to both the Israeli and Palestinian sides, and tells both that they know each other better than any one in the world know either of them, and that they will have to create the stability needed for peace. He stressed that the overall problem is clearly a territorial problem, not a religious one.

¶12. (S) He also said that Hamas is not so big a problem that it cannot be dealt with. The Omanis' advice to Hamas has been that the movement must focus on internal issues, and not on an independent foreign policy. Sayyid Fahd concluded that Egypt is the only country that can work with every party, and that all other countries should encourage Egypt to continue in this role.

BORDERS IN THE GULF REGION

¶13. (S) Sayyid Fahd said that finalizing border issues should be a priority. He said that the problems between Saudi Arabia and the Emirates are something that Oman does not understand - and added that the Emirati line is an embarrassment. He noted in comparison that when Oman and Saudi Arabia demarcated their border, both governments ordered that it be done amicably. King Fahd and Sultan Qaboos each nominated one negotiator and directed them to put historical issues aside and come up with a solution in which there was no winner and no loser. The two monarchs cleared every issue, according to Sayyid Fahd. [Note: In the mid 1950s, Saudi Arabia pushed into Omani territory, helping ignite a rebellion that was eventually put down with British assistance. This clearly is the sort of history that both sides wanted to forget. End Note.] Sayyid Fahd noted that the British had made "a mixed salad" of the Omani-Emirati border, but in a similar spirit, the two sides compromised to reach a final demarcation.
Schmierer